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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU/CUBA: DUTCH GRAPPLE WITH  
PROSPECTIVE POLICY CHANGE

REF: STATE 262206

Classified By: DCM Daniel Russel for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Dutch will chair the December 14 EU working party meeting on Latin America (COLAT), at which they expect to discuss four or five Member State proposals for amending current EU policy toward Cuba. There is consensus that the present policy is unsustainable. The Dutch emphasized they do not wish the EU to appear to be softening toward the Cuban government as "they have not earned it." The EU, however, is frustrated that the diplomatic freeze resulting from the current policy of inviting dissidents to national days has prevented the EU from positively influencing Cuba. The Dutch sought U.S. advice on how best to package any change in policy so that the U.S. could find it acceptable. End Summary.

12. (C) Poloff delivered reftel points to MFA Cuba policy advisor Jan Jaap Groenemeijer December 9, and DCM followed up with Western Hemisphere Director Marianne Kappeyne van de Coppello on the margins of the US-EU Ministerial on December 10. EU frustration over Havana's freeze-out of EU missions in Havana and concerns that there can be no progress without dialogue is prompting the EU to seek alternatives to the current policy of inviting dissidents to national day events, Kappeyne van de Coppello said. She added that the EU, looking toward a post-Castro Cuba, feels a strong need to "develop lines of communication and political relationships" that could help the EU to "soften Cuba's landing" during a transition. Kappeyne van de Coppello, who will chair the December 14 COLAT, told the DCM that the EU has four or five proposals on the table and asked how the EU might "package" an eventual change in policy in a way that the U.S. would find acceptable. One proposal she mentioned was for EU Embassies in Havana to discontinue observing national days, thereby "removing the irritant" of inviting dissidents; another idea was to "open a time-limited window of opportunity" for the EU to engage with Cuba and call on Cuba to respond in kind with positive political movement.

13. (C) DCM reminded Kappeyne van de Coppello that the goal of engaging Cuba is not "dialogue" alone but "real change in Cuba." She readily acknowledged the point, recalling that with one dissident being released each day, the number could eventually become significant. Characterizing the releases as a cynical ploy, the DCM emphasized U.S. concern about the EU policy being influenced by Cuba, rather than the reverse. Kappeyne van de Coppello agreed with the DCM's emphatic point that it was not effective to respond to bad behavior with concessions in order to entice good behavior, and she emphasized that the Dutch and EU do not want to be seen as softening their position but rather as remaining tough but effective in fostering positive change. The DCM recalled the recent aborted visit by Dutch Parliamentarians to Havana, which Kappeyne van de Coppello dismissed as a publicity stunt; the DCM retorted that Cuba's reaction was nevertheless telling, and not encouraging. Kappeyne van de Coppello was concerned how Washington might react to change in EU policy; the DCM reminded her that "this is not a non-trivial issue for us."

14. (C) On the side, Kappeyne van de Coppello noted that the Dutch bilateral position was to keep the current policy in place. She observed further that some countries bear national economic concerns in mind during COLAT, but she did not elaborate. Although other Dutch interlocutors have suggested in the past that they would prefer to let the issue slide out of their presidency, Kappeyne van de Coppello and Groenemeijer expressed hope that an agreement be reached as soon as possible.

15. (C) Kappeyne van de Coppello did not expect the COLAT to reach a final agreement on December 14. Even if the COLAT does reach agreement, she noted, the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) would still need to approve a decision before sending it to the GAERC or European Council for endorsement. Kappeyne van de Coppello was clearly aware of the possible negative impact of a change on EU-US relations, and asked for advice on how the Dutch/EU might best package any change in EU policy toward Cuba to make it more palatable.

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